

Message Text

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ORIGIN PRS-01

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DRAFTED BY S/PRS: JMORDWAY
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FOR CARTER FROM S/PRS

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: SOPN, OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS R.)

SUBJECT:NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL
NO. 6
HEREWITH FULL TEXT NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL OF 2/16
ENTITLED "LAST THINGS FIRST IN THE MIDDLE EAST"

BEGIN TEXT

THE SURE WAY TO WRECK ANY NEGOTIATION IS TO INSIST THAT
THE MAIN ISSUE ON THE TABLE MUST BE SETTLED BEFORE THE
CONFEREES TAKE THEIR SEATS. ON HIS FIRST TOUR THROUGH
THE MIDDLE EAST, SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE IS UNDERSTAND-
ABLY EAGER TO PREPARE A BARGAINING PROCESS, TO GET
EVERYONE SEATED SOMEWHERE. BUT HE IS FOR SOME REASON
TREADING PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO THAT SELF-DESTRUCT BUTTON.
HE WENT SAYING HE WISHED ONLY TO LISTEN ON THIS FIRST
JOURNEY THROUGHT THE AREA, YET BY POSING WHAT IS PROBABLY
THE WRONG QUESTION AT THE WRONG TIME AND IN THE WRONG
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WAY, HE MAY ALREADY HAVE SAID TOO MUCH.

PERHAPS MR. VANCE'S AIRBORNE REFRAIN -- THAT HE WISHES TO
LEARN WHETHER THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION HAS
BECOME MODERATE ENOUGH TO PARTICIPATE IN NEGOTIATIONS

WITH ISRAEL -- IS MEANT ONLY TO GIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

CONTENT TO AN EMPTY ATTACHE CASE. PERHAPS HE INTENDS TO MAKE IT CLEAR ON THE GROUND IN ISRAEL, SYRIA, EGYPT, LEBANON, JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA THAT HE IS NOT IN FACT URGING PLO PARTICIPATION, OR EVEN A PLO NATION, AND THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD NOT AND COULD NOT GET INTO THE BUSINESS OF DECIDING WHETHER THE PLO OR ANY OTHER POLITICAL AGENT IS THE BEST REPRESENTATIVE OF PALESTINIANS THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. PERHAPS HE MEANS BY HIS QUESTION ONLY TO SUGGEST THAT THERE IS A PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, AS DISTINCT FROM ONE PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION, THAT NEEDS TO BE RECOGNIZED AMONG THE CENTRAL TOPICS OF THE NEXT PHASE OF NEGOTIATION. HE HAD BETTER MAKE HIS MEANING CLEAR.

OTHERWISE HE WILL SURELY TURN THE ISRAELIS TOWARD DIPLOMATIC INTRANSIGENCE IN THEIR CURRENT UNHAPPY ELECTORAL SEASON. THE FUTURE OF THE OCCUPIED, ONCE JORDANIAN WEST BANK TERRITORY INHABITED LARGELY BY PALESTINIANS, IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE ON THE BARGAINING TABLE. TO DESIGNATE THE PLO AS THE PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN FOR ALL PALESTINIANS, WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO NAMING IT HEIR TO THE WEST BANK, EVEN IF ITS SOVEREIGNTY THERE WERE FINALLY DILUTED IN SOME CONFEDERAL SCHEME WITH JORDAN.

BUT THERE MAY BE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PLO, AT THE BARGAINING TABLE AND IN THE WEST BANK. KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN HAS REGAINED SOME ROOM FOR BARGAINING FOR THE WEST BANK, WITH BOTH SYRIA AND EGYPT. AND THE WEST BANKERS MAY WELL PREFER HIM TO THE PLO, IF THAT WERE THE ONLY CHOICE.

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THEY DESERVE TO BE CONSULTED. THERE MAY ALSO EMERGE A "PLO" OF QUITE DIFFERENT COMPLEXION THAN THE PRESENT GROUPING LED BY YASIR ARAFAT.

THE SYRIAN AND EGYPTIAN MOTIVES IN PLUMPING FOR THE PLO'S RECOGNITION ARE AMBIGUOUS, AT BEST. THE PLO CHALLENGED SYRIA IN THE LEBANESE WAR AND EMERGED WEAKENED AND DIVIDED. CAIRO AND DAMASCUS MAY BE INTENDING A SMOTHERING EMBRACE THAT WOULD PRESERVE A TAMED REMNANT OF THE PLO UNDER JORDANIAN CONTROL WITHOUT AROUSING THE HOSTILITY OF THEIR OWN RADICALS.

IT IS NO DISGRACE FOR THE FOREMOST DIPLOMAT OF A NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION TO CROSS THIS MOST TREACHEROUS DIPLOMATIC TERRAIN WITHOUT A FORMULA. MR VANCE CONCEDES THAT HE HAS NO FORMULA FOR A SETTLEMENT. BUT HE DOES SEEM UNNECESSARILY CONCERNED ABOUT A FORUM FOR NEGOTIATION, ABOUT REVIVING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OF ALL THE

PARTIES, INCLUDING THE SOVIET UNION. AND GENEVA, RIGHT
OFF, FORCES EVERYONE TO DECIDE WHETHER THE PLO IS A
PRINCIPAL PARTY IN THE CONFLICT.

THAT APPROACH PUTS LAST THINGS FIRST. IF THE ISRAELIS
ARE TO BE PERSUADED, OR PRESSURED, INTO YIELDING MOST OF
THE WEST BANK, THEY MUST BE OFFERED A SECURE PEACE, WHICH
MEANS STABLE FRONTIERS AND REGIMES BEYOND THOSE FRONTIERS
THAT AGREE TO LIVE IN PEACE, IF NOT FRIENDSHIP. TO
INSIST THAT THE PLO AND ISRAEL BECOME THE FIRST TO
ACCOMMODATE ON THESE TERMS SEEMS TANTAMOUNT TO SAYING THAT
IF THERE WERE NO PROBLEM THE PROBLEM COULD BE SOLVED. BY
WHATEVER DIPLOMATIC MEANS, AT WHATEVER TABLE, EGYPT,
SYRIA, JORDAN AND ISRAEL MUST BE BROUGHT INTO A PROCESS
IN WHICH THEY CAN RECOGNIZE THE OUTLINES OF A SETTLEMENT
AND IN TERMS OF WHICH THEY WILL THEN TURN TO THE CLAIMS
-- AND WISHES -- OF THE PALESTINIANS.
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END TEXT

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